

The Pilgrim's Progress

Studies of the League Topics for February 21st and March 21st.

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THE SLOUGH OF DESPOND.

(Psalms 69, 1-4, 13-18; 40, 1-3.)

IN the January Study Christian was seen starting out from the city of Destruction, with Obstinate and Pliable in hot pursuit, to bring him back by force. When the Pilgrim was overtaken they tried, in vain, to persuade him to return. Having failed of their purpose, Obstinate returned to his friends, while Pliable resolved to seek life with Christian.

THE SLOUGH OF DESPOND.

For a time they journeyed together and talked of the "unspeakable things of God," until when, in the midst of the plain, they drew nigh to a very miry slough, and, being thoughtless of danger, both fell suddenly into the bog. By a desperate effort Pliable escaped from the mire on the side next to his own house, and, being angry with Christian because of their misfortune, he also returned to his home, while the Pilgrim struggled alone in the Slough of Despond, endeavoring to reach the side toward the wicket-gate.

from the consequence of past misdeeds any more than you can escape from the force of gravitation, which holds all created things in its irresistible grasp. At this moment you are carrying in your blood the sins of the past, and deeds of pride and passion done long years ago are potent still to subdue your will and deform your life. Nature opens no door of escape from past sins and their penalty of pain. Left to himself, the sinner would perish in despair.

2. Forgetfulness of sin is impossible! Nothing committed to the care of consciousness is lost. Memory of sin is immortal. Christian saw again his past misdeeds. They rose around him until he felt that he was sinking into an "horrible pit and into the miry clay." David cried, "My sin is ever before me." He had done a great wrong. He had violated the sanctity of Uriah's home, and then tried to cover his sin by the murder of his brave soldier. But God set David's secret sin before the light of His countenance, and it could not be hidden. He could not escape from his sin. He could not forget it; and, in anguish of soul, he cried, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness, according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions."



Painting by Mrs. Seymour Lucas.

By courtesy of the "Northwestern Christian Advocate"

"WE ARE BUT LITTLE CHILDREN WEAK"

This picture of Pilgrim is true to life. It is an experience that all pass through who are convicted of sin. Seeking to escape from the city of Destruction, they are mired in their sins. David tells us how he found himself sinking in "the deep mire where there is no standing" (Ps. 69.2), and how he was "brought up out of an horrible pit and out of the miry clay" (Ps. 40, 2).

Men fall into the Slough of Despond because:

1. Nature has no forgiveness for sin! With this truth all are familiar. It has been declared again and again by the world's greatest teachers, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." The law of harvest is a universal law, and as unchanging as the eternities of God. No magic can change the tares into wheat, or the wild oats into corn. Tares sown will produce nothing but tares, and wild oats will produce only wild oats. No force in nature can make them produce anything different. Consequence follows the evil-doer to the "last step of the journey, and to the last moment of recorded time." This is a natural, not an arbitrary law. It is a law written in our members. Pain is the penalty of sin. Nature has no pardon to offer the sinner. You cannot escape

The deeds of folly done long years ago are with us still. From secret chambers of the mind, old sins step out to meet and torment us. You may cry to them "Down! down!" as Macbeth cried to Banquo's ghost; but they will not down. Again and again they will come like phantoms to haunt you. All, like Pilgrim, know what it is to have "the curtains of memory" rolled up, and, as on a stage, to see "the sad and sordid past reacted to the wailing music of an infinite regret."

Poor Christian struggled only to sink deeper in the mire, until Help coming, took Pilgrim by the hand and lifted him out of the Slough. Then, having been thus encouraged, Christian started out again on his journey.

Awakened souls still fall into the Slough of Despond, but God's promises are sure, and He still sends His Messenger to help them out of the horrible pit, and start them again on their way to the wicket-gate.

THE WICKET-GATE.

(Matthew 7, 7-14.)

As Christian was walking along alone, after his escape from the Slough of Despond, he met with Mr. Worldly Wise-